

1.0 SYMPOSIUM OPENING REMARKS

*Donald B Sherritt
Transport Canada*

Good morning ladies & gentlemen... it gives me great pleasure to welcome you to this 12th Annual Symposium on Human Factors in Aviation Maintenance.

I am pleased to see how this symposium has grown over the years into an international event. An event where aviation maintenance experts from many countries can get together to share experiences and focus on how human factors affect our world. It is quite fitting that the first truly multinational Human Factors in Aviation Maintenance symposium be held here, in the United Kingdom, one of the busiest aviation hubs in the world. This particular conference holds great promise. With international speakers representing all facets of the aviation industry, the benefits to be derived from bringing people together and offering up the latest information are immeasurable.

I'm sure most of you have gritted your teeth at recent news articles with doomsday predictions of aircraft falling from the sky. Safety forecasters are predicting that if the accident rate remains at the present level, by the year 2010 we could have a major hull loss every week. At the recent symposium on "Technology and the Flight Deck" held in Vancouver, I was particularly impressed by the remarks of Pierre Jeannot, Director General of [IATA](#). He reminded us that with the anticipated growth in air traffic, we may have to halve the accident rate just to keep the total numbers where they are today. He also made the point that perception is everything. The public is not likely to respond favorably to reassurances that the system is statistically safe. They are far more likely to be moved by the images they see on the six o'clock news.

Should we be concerned about these dire predictions? The answer of course, is yes. If we lose the confidence of the flying public, we will not only feel the effects directly in damaged business. There will also be indirect effects as regulators are faced with pressure to respond with overly restrictive counter measures.

In reality, the system has never been safer, and the trends are all in the right direction. To take the Canadian situation, 1996 was an exceptional year for aviation safety, with 19% fewer accidents and 52 % fewer fatalities, than the previous five year averages. Nevertheless, Transport Canada recognizes that if we're to prevent these frightful predictions from becoming a reality, we must find new ways to achieve more ambitious safety goals. Attention to the role of human error in maintenance seems to be one of the most promising ways to do that.

Even without the impetus of increased air traffic, we would have been turning our attention to maintenance and human factors. Since the introduction of jet transports in the fifties, we have been continually improving the technological side of the equation, and we are now into an area of diminishing returns. It's only natural that we should turn our attention to the human element. Human performance on the flight deck has been a concern for a several years now, culminating in the acceptance of Cockpit Resource Management initiatives.

We have come to realize that maintenance personnel are subject to similar pressures. Transport Canada does not however, subscribe to the belief that a slightly altered version of [CRM](#) can provide an easy fix for maintenance errors. Instead, we want to work in partnership with the industry to find new ways to resolve these problems, tailored to the maintenance environment.

Maintaining aircraft is a complex business, and anything we can do to eliminate complications and reduce stress will be beneficial to all. Modern technology has brought new pressures, some that our aviation forebears never had to deal with, others oddly familiar. Each new design requires advanced training for the manufacturing and maintenance personnel who will build or repair it. But some of the new technologies, computer software and composite repair for example, do not lend themselves readily to inspection after the fact. Much as with the tradesmen of old, we are forced back into reliance on the integrity of the practitioner. Back to reliance on the human factors.

Forums such as this provide members with an opportunity to share timely and accurate information. We should also use the time to discuss how we can jointly improve public confidence in our ever-expanding industry. No doubt you are all, like me, looking forward to the various speakers who, I am sure, will offer lessons we can all learn from. Your varied backgrounds, experience, and expertise will be of great value to all of us participating this week.

I would like to thank our regulatory colleagues from the UK, the Civil Aviation Authority, for their efforts in hosting this symposium. And finally, on behalf of the Director General of Civil Aviation in Canada, I am pleased to accept the challenge to host the 14th Annual Human Factors in Aviation Maintenance symposium in the Year 2000. All of you will be apprised of the details once they are finalized.

I wish you an enjoyable three days, and look forward to seeing you again at next year's symposium, and again, in Canada two years hence.

I would like now to give the floor to Mr. John Goglia, of the National Transportation Safety Board of the United States of America.